Gaelic nobility of Ireland

This article concerns the **Gaelic nobility of Ireland** from ancient to modern times. It only partly overlaps with Chiefs of the Name because it excludes Scotland and other discussion. It is one of three groups of Irish nobility, the others being those nobles descended from the Hiberno-Normans and those granted titles of nobility in the Peerage of Ireland.

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Legal status

By the time of the Treaty of Limerick, almost all Gaelic nobles had lost any semblance of real power in their (former) domains. Today, such historical titles have no special legal status in the Republic of Ireland, unlike in Northern Ireland, which has remained a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland does not confer titles of nobility under its constitution.[1]

From 1943 until 2003 some of the modern representatives of the Gaelic nobility obtained a courtesy recognition as Chiefs of the Name from the Irish government. The practice ended in 2003 following certain scandals (Terence Francis MacCarthy) and under concerns that it was unconstitutional.[2] Disputed titles, as well as those for whom recognition is still pending, are not listed.

Nobles

Clann territories were under the rule and control of a Chief, who was elected by a vote of descendants (within three generations) of the preceding Chief. The designation as Chief was also referred to as a King (Ri), Lord (Tiarna), or Captain of his countries, all of which were roughly equivalent prior to the collapse of the Gaelic order. The concept of a hereditary "title" originated with the adoption of English law, the policy of surrender and regrant and the collapse of the Gaelic order during the period from approximately 1585–1610. Because the election of a new chief would almost always be from the same family (or families) within a tribal area, each family developed a long history of ruling within an area, which gave rise to the concept of Gaelic nobility. However, ruling titles did not pass by hereditary descent; rather it was by election and bloodshed, given the absence of criminal penalties for th death of an opponent.

All below are flatha (princes) and also descendants in the male line, however distant in some cases, from at least one historical grade of **Rí**, a Rí túaithe (usually a local petty king), a Ruiri (overking or regional king), or a greater Rí ruirech (king of overkings, also called a provincial king or *Rí cóicid*). A number of *rí ruirech* also became Ard Rí and their surviving princely descendants remain claimants to the long vacant, so-called High Kingship.[3] A modern Gaelic noble may be styled a self-proclaimed flaith (prince) or tiarna (lord, count/earl). See also White Rod.

The ancient Gaelic families are divided by race and sept, and by geography

- Connachta
  - Uí Briúin Ai (Síl Muiredaig)
    - The O'Conor Don[4]
    - The MacDermot of Moylurg, Prince of Coolavin
    - The O'Rourke of Breifne
- Uí Néill
  - Cenél nEógain
    - O'Donnelly of Ballydonnelly Hereditary Marshal of Ulster
      - O'Neill dynasty
        - The O'Neill of Clanaboy Prince of Ulster
  - Cenél Conaill
    - The O'Donnell, Prince of Tyrconnell
    - The O'Dogherty of Inishowen
- Uí Maine
  - The O'Kelly of Gallagh and Tycooly, Prince of Hy Many
  - The Fox of Tethbae (O'Kearney)
- Laigin
  - Uí Cheinnselaig
    - The MacMorrough Kavanagh, Prince of Leinster[5]
    - The O'Morchoe
    - The O'Toole of Fer Tire (in abeyance)
- Osraige
  - Dál Birn
    - Kings of Osraige
    - Mac Giolla Phádraig (Fitzpatrick) dynasty
- Dál gCais
  - The O'Brien, Prince of Thomond
  - The O'Grady of Killyballyowen
  - O'Kennedy family
  - McInerney family
  - MacMahon family
- Dál Fiatach
  - MacDonlevy (dynasty)[6] (MacNulty)[7]
- Eóganachta
  - Eóganacht Chaisil
    - The O'Callaghan of Duhallow Lord of Clonmeen
    - The McGillycuddy of the Reeks, Lord of Doonebo[8]
    - The O'Donoghue of the Glens, Prince of Glenflesk[9]

        - O'Connell, hereditary castellans of Ballycarbery Castle. From this sept came Daniel O'Connell of Derrynane, "The Liberator."
    - Uí Fidgenti
        - The O'Donovan of Clancahill[10]
- Corcu Duibne
    - O'Shea of Iveragh (now represented by the descendants of Martin Archer Shee, the noted 19th-century portrait artist)
- Norse Gaelic origins
    - Clann Somhairle – Crovan dynasty[11]
        - Clan Donald
            - The MacDonnell of the Glens
- The King of Dublin

O'Neill claimants

Other O'Neills did not apply for recognition. The most notable of these is the Prince of the Fews, Don Carlos O'Neill, 12th Marquis of Granja. There is currently a dispute between him and the Prince of Clanaboy (above) over who is the "senior," with the matter appearing unresolvable.[12] However most recently O'Neill of Clanaboy may have gotten the upper hand in the dispute.[13]

The O'Neills of the Fews are a 15th-century branch of the Tyrone or Ó Néill Mór line whereas the O'Neills of Clanaboy are a High Medieval line. Hence the matter is academic, both being somewhat distant from the last sovereigns of Tyrone in Ulster (to 1607), whose plentiful descendants eventually fell into comparative obscurity.[12] Today they are known as the McShane-O'Neills, or the anglicized version- Johnson.

O'Donnell succession

The chosen and recognised heir apparent of the Prince of Tyrconnell, Fr. Hugh O'Donel, O.F.M., is Don Hugo O'Donnell, 7th Duke of Tetuan.[14] Other members of the family have disputed this, most notably Fr. Hugh's sister, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, who has even on television and radio disputed the exclusion from the succession process of potential female and female line claimants, but the head of the dynasty has been firm in his choice of his distant cousin the Duke of Tetuan.[15]

Other Gaelic nobles

MacCarthys Mór

The most recent *legitimate* claimants to the royal title of MacCarthy Mór (Prince of Desmond) are two close relatives, Barry Trant MacCarthy (Mór), now elderly (born 1931), and the younger Liam Trant MacCarthy (Mór) (born 1957). They are descendants of Cormac of Dunguil, younger son of Tadhg na Mainistreach Mac Carthaigh Mór, King of Desmond (died 1426), they belonging to the Srugrena sept, but after applying for recognition still await it following the immense scandal involving the impostor Terence MacCarthy.[16] Both MacCarthys Mór are descendants of a brother, William Patrick, of Samuel Trant MacCarthy (died 1927), whose pedigree was registered in 1906 by Sir Arthur Vicars, the Ulster King of Arms,[17] after which he decided to revive the title of MacCarthy Mór.[18] According to the law of primogeniture (although not a Gaelic custom in origin) the younger Liam is the senior surviving male member of the family,[19] however the elder Barry believed he himself was this at the time he applied for recognition.[20] In any event, the family have a number of male heirs,[21] and relations among them are amiable.[22] Liam MacCarthy's pedigree was accepted and registered by Thomas Woodcock, the Norroy and Ulster King of Arms, in July 2009, the document including MacCarthy's children and grandchildren.[23]

It was the pedigree of their family into which Terence MacCarthy inserted himself to gain recognition as the MacCarthy Mór.[18]

Remaining agnates

There remain other Gaelic nobles who are not of the "senior" lines, but whose descent is recognised in Europe and a number of whom also hold Continental titles.

- The Count O'Donnell of Austria (O'Donell von Tyrconnell)
- The Count O'Rourke of Russia
- O'Nelly, The Count O'Nelly of Austria, Commander of the 72nd Bohemian Regiment

Other

- Dál gCais
  - Baron Lisle (Lysaght)
- O'Neill dynasty
  - MacShane-Johnson family
- O'Connell family
- Healy
  - Earl of Donoughmore

See also

- Irish nobility which distinguishes three groups of Irish nobility of which this article treats of one such group.
- Kingdoms of Ireland
- Irish genealogy
- Irish kings
- Petty kingdom
- Immemorial nobility
- Incorporeal hereditament
- Hereditary title
- Tanistry
- Derbfine
- Sept
- Substantive title
- British nobility

Notes

1. The Irish Constitution (http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/upload/static/256.htm) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20100516000000/http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/upload/static/256.htm) 16 May 2010 at the Wayback Machine
2. Curley, pp. 179–80; Charles Lysaght (in Curley), p. 14
3. Curley, pp. 26–7, and following profiles; see also Jaski, pp. 37–40, 89, 99–102; Byrne, pp. 41–2, for academic discussion on the types of *rí*
4. The current O'Conor Don has dropped the style *The* O'Conor Don, *Prince of Connacht* used by his father, considering *O'Conor Don* to be "historically grand enough by itself". Curley, p. 155
5. The MacMorrough Kavanagh (http://www.hbci.com/~tiraha/leinster/mmk.html) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20120119075126/http://www.hbci.com/~tiraha/leinster/mmk.html) 19 January 2012 at the Wayback Machine

6. John O'Hart, *Irish Pedigrees; or, The Origin and Stem of the Irish Nation*, 5th edition, in two volumes, originally published in Dublin in 1892, reprinted, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1976, Vol. 1, pp. 417-418 and 426-428, One of the most ancient of Gaelic Ireland's royal lines, the MacDonlevy are often neglected from the recounting of its nobility. They have been obscured to history for two reasons. First, the dynasty's final patronage of Ulaid fell to the forces of Henry Plantagenet in 1177 centuries before the English implemented the policy of Surrender and regrant, and, so, the MacDonlevy are not represented in the more modern English dominated Irish peerage, except by a few obscure instances of intermarriage. Second, staunch Roman Catholics and Jacobites, the MacDonlevy line of Captain of his Nation died out in Continental exile with the Stuarts in Paris in the late 19th century decades before the formation of the Republic of Ireland and a half century before the Republic's brief period of courtesy recognition of these princely titles. As Irish nobles, the MacDonlevy were solely nobles of Gaelic Ireland.
7. *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 35 MacCarwell - Maltby (Sidney Lee Ed.). (1893) New York: MacMillan & Co., p. 52, "As the family originally came from Ulidia, the lesser Uladh, or Ulster, the members of the family are often called in Irish writings, instead of MacDonlevy, Ultach, that is, Ulsterman, and from this the name of MacNulty, Mac an Ultaigh, son of the Ulsterman, is derived."
8. Cadet branch of O'Sullivan Mor. See Ellis, p. 157; Curley, p. 116
9. Considered by many to now be the O'Donoghue Mor and thus Prince of Locha Léin, but has not yet claimed the title See Ellis, pp. 137–8, noting "the family has no such intention". But compare Curley, pp. 109–12, who styles O'Donoghue the Prince of Locha Léin anyway, because the senior dynasty have of course gone extinct.
10. For the genealogy of the O'Donovans see Donnubán mac Cathail
11. The Clann Somhairle, although claiming Irish ancestry are also considered a "cadet branch" (maternal line) of the Crovan dynasty, Kings of Mann and the Isles, likely a branch of the Norse-Irish Uí Ímair. See Alex Woolf, The origins and ancestry of Somerled: Gofraid mac Fergusa and 'The Annals of the Four Masters' (https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/staff/alexwoolf/originsandancestry.pdf), *Medieval Scandinavia 15* (2005)
12. Ellis, pp. 231 ff
13. Curley, p. 43
14. Curley, p. 61
15. Curley, pp. 59–62
16. Ellis, pp. 125–7
17. Ellis, pp. 124–6
18. Ellis, p. 125
19. Ellis, p. 126, and *passim*
20. Ellis, p. 127
21. Ellis, p. 126
22. Ellis, *passim*
23. Norroy and Ulster King of Arms, 9 July 2009, Reference R.I.P.09/192

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